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DE RUEHVJ #1417/01 2481614  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH (CCY ADD24C71 MSI4225-695)  
R 041614Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO  
TO RHMFISS/COMUSNAVEUR NAPLES IT  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0258  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8886  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUZEJAA/USNIC SARAJEVO  
RUSNMHS/HQ USEUCOM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SARAJEVO 001417

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NAPLES FOR ADMIRAL FITZGERALD, USNIC FOR WIGHTMAN, MCLANE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [BK](#)  
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - SCENESETTER FOR ADMIRAL FITZGERALD'S  
SEPTEMBER 10-11 VISIT TO SARAJEVO

REF: A. SARAJEVO 479  
[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 569

Classified By: Amb. Charles English for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Despite Bosnia's having achieved formal progress in its path toward candidacy for the EU and NATO, the political situation in Bosnia has not improved, and in some ways it has continued to deteriorate since your January visit. Political leaders continue to engage in a destabilizing dialogue among themselves and focus their time and energy on the issues that divide the country rather than on those that could bring it together and move it forward. Defense reform remains a bright spot, however, but much of the progress we have achieved over the last several months (i.e., moveable defense property agreement; a smooth general officer rotation) has required robust U.S. and NATO engagement. While you will want to compliment leaders on the success of defense reform so far, you also want to stress that much more needs to be done, particularly reaching agreement on immovable defense property. You will also want to caution that Bosnia is only at the beginning of the road to NATO membership, a membership that must be earned by implementing the reforms necessary to ensure Bosnia is a productive member of the Alliance. Your trip comes in the wake of the decision to replace the U.S. General at NATO HQ with a European. With this in mind, you will want to reassure anxious interlocutors of the continuing U.S. commitment to Bosnia's security. Finally, you should thank senior officials for Bosnia's decision to expand its modest deployment to Iraq.

Political Climate Continues to Deteriorate  
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[1](#)2. (C) Since your January visit, the political climate in Bosnia has continued to deteriorate. Bosnia's June 16 signing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU provided only a brief respite from nationalist name-calling among Bosniak, Serb, and Croat politicians. Politicians could have seized upon the July 21 arrest of Radovan Karadzic to advance reconciliation here, but instead sought to exploit it to advance their narrow, nationalist political agendas. (Perhaps the best example is the glass-empty complaint by Bosniak Tri-Presidency member Silajdzic that, though Karadzic under arrest and Milosevic dead, their "genocide-based project" -- the Republika Srpska

-- remains.) With the approach of the October municipal elections Bosnia's political leaders have further ratcheted up their nationalist rhetoric: the Serbs speculating about Republika Srpska (RS) independence; the Croats openly calling for creation of a third entity; and the Bosniaks advocating constitutional reforms that would abolish the RS. Not surprisingly, in this environment there is little scope for politicians to reach meaningful agreements that would advance Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. As a consequence, the reform process, including on immovable defense property, has stalled.

#### Defense Reform: Impressive Progress, But Much More Work

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13. (C) Defense reform remains one of the biggest success stories in Bosnia since Dayton. Since abolishing the two entity-level militaries and ministries of defense and creating a single state institution in their place in 2005, Bosnia has taken the first steps to create a unified, effective military. The government has developed a clear and direct command and control structure, and with active U.S. support and engagement, a legally consistent and transparent way to manage the transition of the Joint Chief of Staff (Ref A). The new state-level institutions met the conditions for PfP membership in 2006 and for an Intensified Dialogue in April 2008. Bosnia's intra-governmental NATO Commission will have just finished its Intensified Dialogue "kick-off" meeting with officials in Brussels the day you arrive in Sarajevo. Nonetheless, there remains much work to be done -- a point you will want to stress with your Bosnian interlocutors.

#### Property Issues Remain Critical

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14. (C) Among other things, the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces must still implement the political agreement on moveable defense property reached in February -- again only after robust U.S. and NATO engagement -- by selling, donating or destroying excess weapons and ammunition (Ref B). Despite the agreement and clear practical advantages, brigade commanders are reluctant to consolidate stored weapons or ammunition -- instead, excess munitions have remained where they had lain as property of the entity armies. An agreement on immovable property is also necessary to allow the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH) to sell excess real estate and free its forces from the taxing burden of guarding excess sites. It is also, at U.S. insistence, one of the five objectives set by the Peace Implementation Council as a pre-condition for closing the Office of the High Representative.

15. (C) Although a political agreement was made among entity and state prime ministers in July, 2007 which aimed to resolve the immovable defense property issue, the issue has not been resolved. Unfortunately, the immovable defense property issue has become a proxy for an existential debate about the nature of the Bosnian state between Serbs and Bosniaks. The Serbs, led by RS PM Dodik, who is loathe to accept a state presence in the RS, insist that all immovable property belongs to the entities, though he claims he is prepared to allow the state usage rights. The Bosniaks, led by Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Silajdzic, who is loathe to acknowledge the very existence of the RS, insist that all property already belongs to the state. During your meetings with the senior Bosnian leaders, you will want to stress the importance to Bosnia's NATO aspirations of approving a transfer agreement on immovable property by state and entity governments that meets the needs the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces.

#### NATO Aspirations: Substance Matters

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16. (C) Most Bosnians believe NATO membership is absolutely necessary for their country's long-term peace and prosperity, and many believe it within reach. The government's stated objective is a Membership Action Plan (MAP) by NATO's next

summit, and some are hoping for an invitation to join by that time. This overly optimistic prognosis is indicative of a broad lack of understanding of the implications and requirements of NATO membership. As a result, we are confronted with the delicate task of keeping the Bosnians motivated, while simultaneously injecting a dose of realism into the discussions. There has been little public discussion about what the path forward entails, particularly the necessity of reform across the board, including in civilian institutions. Some, including several (mainly Bosniak) politicians, believe Bosnia is owed NATO membership because of what they perceive as the international community's failure to prevent the tragedies of the 1992-1995 war. You will want to underscore to your interlocutors that NATO membership is earned, not gifted, and that this requires a sustained commitment to reforms across the board.

#### America's Commitment to Bosnia

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¶7. (C/NF) Despite the signing of the SAA, many Bosnians remain skeptical about Europe's commitment to the country. This anxiety reflects Europe's record during the 1992-1995 war, notably its association with UNPROFOR, erratic European leadership in other areas (e.g., police reform), and widespread perceptions that EUFOR is a weak reed. As a consequence, Bosnians, particularly on defense and security issues, look to the U.S. for leadership and worry that the U.S. will disengage. Though the Bosnian government has not yet been officially informed of the decision to replace General Wightman as the Commander of NATO HQ with a European, most of your interlocutors are aware of it, and several may raise their concerns about it with you. With this in mind, you will want to emphasize that the U.S. commitment to Bosnia's security is enduring. You can also underscore that we plan to remain engaged and visible even as our permanent foot-print shrinks. You might cite the September 16-18 visit of U.S.S. Roosevelt to Neum and the September 2009 NATO PfP Exercise Combined Endeavor in Banja Luka as examples.

#### Bosnia and Iraq

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¶8. (C) Our bilateral security relationship with Bosnia is strong. Bosnia has deployed eight platoon rotations of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit to Iraq since 2005, and just deployed a new multi-ethnic platoon-plus of 49 infantry soldiers to Iraq in mid-August. We have successfully pressed the Bosnians to ensure that all overseas deployments be multi-ethnic, and thus serve as a positive model for the future of the AFBiH-- a small, niche capable, NATO inter-operable and completely integrated force focused on providing support for international missions. Political support for the Iraq deployment has solidified, particularly after all three members of the Presidency visited the troops in May 2007, and we expect authorization for continued deployment of the EOD to remain routine. Looking forward, we will push for BiH to deploy a multi-ethnic company to Iraq or Afghanistan, which, because of the need to train a reserve and a follow-up company, would effectively create an integrated battalion in the BiH Armed Forces.

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